

Tātaki Whakakitenga
Exhibition Guide

Vāle | Julian Hooper &
Albert L. Refiti



12 September - 23 October 2026

NGUTU KĀKĀ

Here's two schools of thought. One. Ideas are precious, but fleeting. If we are to capture good ideas, we must be equally swift to note them down. Linger, procrastinate, and they may disappear forever. Two. Good ideas actually stick. So do the opposite - don't note them down as if the golden ideas are going to slip from your grasp. Instead, let them drift in and out of focus and get parsed through the washing machine of every other idea churning around. The best ideas will emerge from the din, will resonate and cut through the noise. These will be only ones we need pursue, as the 'lost' were never going to be fruitful in the first place.

In approaching the exhibition *Vāle*, I thought a lot about this dichotomy. The exhibition seeks to lightly survey hundreds of drawings produced by each respective artist over decades of work. As we move through the cumulative mass of drawings, at times the contexts in which they were produced are subtly intimated in the works. In Refiti's drawings, we witness annotations in the margins which diaristically trace the sites in which they were made.

As the installation approached completion this week, students past and present smiled as they stopped to read a short introduction positioned at the gallery entrance. Several recalled Refiti's propensity to steal moments to sketch ideas within an array of administrative meetings, crits, and lectures in this very building. While Hooper's drawings are less public, they also attest to swift ideations of ideas. What's also compelling is that they represent a mere selection of a much larger body of drawings drawn from dozens of workbooks. In this way each artist's extensive body of drawings evidence the discipline of capturing momentary ideas, regardless of when and where they arise.

But the exhibition also attests to this latter role of drifting through thoughts indiscriminately. The activity of drawing justifies and indeed thrives through such habitual repetition. The constant repetition of motifs is key

to *Vāle*. Ideas are continually stress-tested and reiterated, with recurring motifs sited in different positions and orientations, and even transgressing the gutter entirely and spilling onto a neighbouring page. I loosely describe these paper-based works as drawings, but perhaps sketches is better description. For the large part, each embraces swift lines as opposed to the slower build-up of refined gradients and shadows. Whilst neither artist is precious in their approach, once seen on mass these drawings construct a compelling archive of thinking, and each has carefully shaped the configuration of the drawings to create an en abyme effect.

In one meeting I asked the artists if they had any ideas for titles. Seemingly instantly, Refiti proposed the term 'vāle', a synonym for 'aimless', 'misguided', or 'ignorant'. The title's wit was not lost on us, as the term is not only versatile across both Tongan and Samoan languages but also communicates with the same immediacy as the drawings. The everyday meaning of vāle is 'dumb'.

Yet despite our self-deprecating humour in adopting it as the exhibition's title, Refiti was also conscious of deeper meanings in play. Tongan Tāvāist philosopher Hūfanga 'Okusitino Māhina, for instance, provides a more nuanced definition of vāle. For Māhina, vāle conveys the polar opposite to order, which is composed of knowledge ('ilo) and skill (poto). In this sense, Refiti describes vāle as indexing 'the stirring up of ilo (or order)' within each artist's daily routines, as they 'drift through an array of cosmopolitan Pacific Art concepts and rituals'. In this sense, Refiti and Hooper both explore and evade deep thought. They have their cake and eat it too.

Whilst *Vāle* takes the form of an exhibition, it is in essence a conglomeration of humble annotations and sketches, each literally sliced from workbooks and pinned to the gallery walls. In this sense, they occupy a curious status between 'high' and 'low' art. Whilst humble in nature,

Refiti's installation was commissioned and developed by Megan Tamati-Quennell for the Sharjah Biennial 16, themed to *carry*. It is seen here with the same dramatic and immersive yellow walls and lighting developed for this high profile exhibition for the first time in Aotearoa. Likewise, those familiar with Hooper's work will recognise numerous recurring motifs that appear in his paintings across decades of work, including numerous figurative forms and hand-scripted alphabets that borrow motifs from his mixed English, Hungarian, and Tongan heritage. When I first proposed the idea of exhibiting the drawings we had multiple options in front of us. But we eventually settled with presenting works from his notebooks only as they most directly index the ideation of these forms as they first appeared. 'Perhaps in the end, this is the most faithful rendition of these forms', Hooper wondered.

I'm out of time, yet there's still much to be discussed. How to do justice to the deeper ideas that permeate these vast drawings, that cumulatively represent decades of thought and reflection? I need an out. The French curator Nicolas Bourriaud once said: 'When I have questions I make an exhibition. When I have answers I write a book'. In this light, perhaps the simple answer is to declare this exhibition a sketch - a luxury not always afforded to the professional curator. Let the drawings do the work. Let's simply dwell in their inquisitive nature, the questions that were at play in the very moment they were made, but which were necessarily unanswered within each drawing. Or to quote The Beastie Boys: 'Don't worry your mind when you give it your best. One-two, one-two, this is just a test.'

Stephen Cleland

ALBERT L. REFITI, VĀNIMONIMO

1-15

Sequence 1, 2024

16-70

Sequence 2, 2022

71-119

Sequence 3, 2021

120-127

Sequence 4, 2020

128-193

Sequence 5, 2018

194-196

Sequence 6, 2017

197-210

Sequence 7, 2017-2016

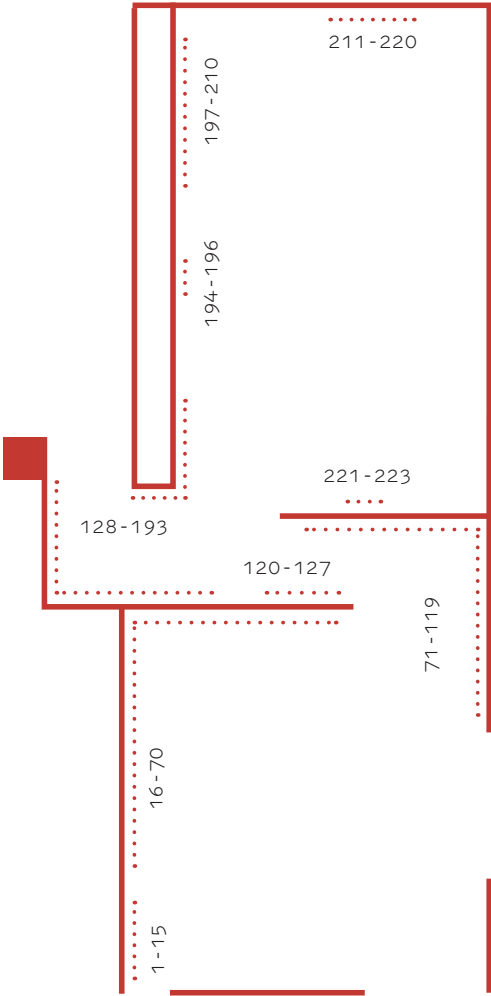
211-220

Sequence 8, 2016

221-223

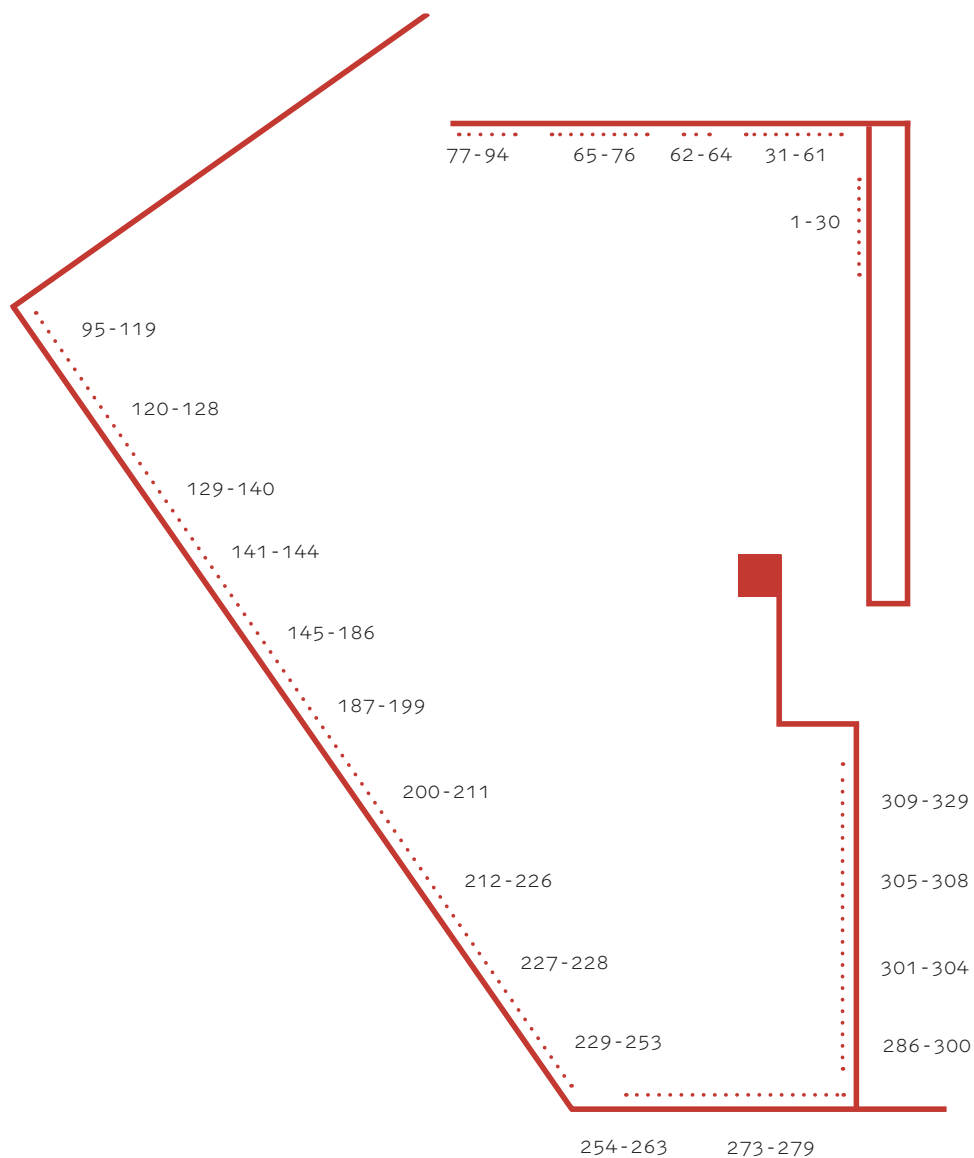
Sequence 9, 2021-2022

All works, ink on paper,
courtesy of the artist



JULIAN HOOPER, REENACTMENT

1-30	30 head drawings on A4 paper	95-119	25 heads on A5 cream sketchbook pages
31-61	31 drawings on warm A4 drawing paper	120-128	9 pages of face network on A3 cream sketchbook pages
62-64	Rain, 3 drawings on A5 warm white paper	129-140	12 pages of face designs on A3 cream sketchbook pages
65-76	12 figures on A3 Eco 100	141-144	4 heads on cream A5 pages
77-94	18 ink pen figures on A4 Dale Rowney paper	145-186	42 heads on A5 pages
		187-199	13 alphabet drawings on A4 pages
		200-211	12 number and letter pages from A3 sketchbook
		212-226	2 J's on A5 cream sketchbook pages
		227-228	15 letters and words drawings on A4 cream paper
		229-253	25 heads on A5 cream sketchbook pages



254-263 10 drawings on A4 photocopy paper

264-272 9 drawings on A4 photocopy paper

273-279 7 drawings on A4 photocopy paper

280-285 6 drawings on A4 photocopy paper

286-300 15 drawings on A4 photocopy paper

301-304 4 drawings on A4 photocopy paper

305-308 4 drawings on A4 photocopy paper

309-329 20 drawings on A4 photocopy paper

All works courtesy of the artist
and Ivan Anthony Gallery, Auckland

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Gallery at Te Kura Toi a Hoahoa –
School of Art and Design, Auckland
University of Technology, to
accompany the exhibition:

Vāle | Julian Hooper &
Albert L. Refiti, curated by
Stephen Cleland

Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery staff:
Curator & Manager: Stephen Cleland
Exhibition Designer: Eddie Clemens
Gallery Assistant: Mitchell McGrath
Operations Administrator: Nat Tozer

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